



8-1997

Factors influencing the retention of senior 4-H members in rural Tennessee : a focus group study

Stephen Earl Cole

Follow this and additional works at: https://trace.tennessee.edu/utk_gradthes

Recommended Citation

Cole, Stephen Earl, "Factors influencing the retention of senior 4-H members in rural Tennessee : a focus group study. " Master's Thesis, University of Tennessee, 1997.
https://trace.tennessee.edu/utk_gradthes/6791

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Graduate School at TRACE: Tennessee Research and Creative Exchange. It has been accepted for inclusion in Masters Theses by an authorized administrator of TRACE: Tennessee Research and Creative Exchange. For more information, please contact trace@utk.edu.

To the Graduate Council:

I am submitting herewith a thesis written by Stephen Earl Cole entitled "Factors influencing the retention of senior 4-H members in rural Tennessee : a focus group study." I have examined the final electronic copy of this thesis for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Science, with a major in Agriculture and Extension Education.

Randol G. Waters, Major Professor

We have read this thesis and recommend its acceptance:

Roy R. Lessly, Ben T. Powell

Accepted for the Council:

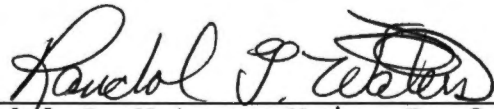
Carolyn R. Hodges

Vice Provost and Dean of the Graduate School

(Original signatures are on file with official student records.)


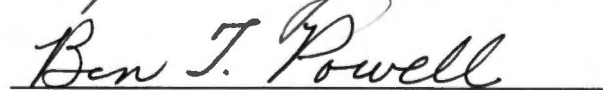
To the Graduate Council:

I am submitting herewith a thesis written by Stephen E. Cole entitled "Factors Influencing the Retention of Senior 4-H Members in Rural Tennessee: A Focus Group Study." I have examined the final copy of this thesis for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Science, with a major in Agricultural and Extension Education.



Randol G. Waters, Major Professor

We have read this thesis
and recommend its acceptance:

Accepted for the Council:



Associate Vice Chancellor and
Dean of The Graduate School

FACTORS INFLUENCING THE RETENTION OF
SENIOR 4-H MEMBERS IN RURAL TENNESSEE:
A FOCUS GROUP STUDY

A Thesis

Presented for the

Master of Science

Degree

The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Stephen E. Cole

August 1997

10-VET-MED.

Thesis

97

.C6

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The author would like to take this opportunity to thank those who proved instrumental in the completion of this work. First thanks goes to Dr. Randol G. Waters for his help and guidance throughout the duration of this study. Also the author would like to acknowledge the efforts of Dr. Roy R. Lessly and Mr. Ben T. Powell for their willingness to assist with this study. Thanks also goes out to the authors family for their support and encouragement throughout the entire process. The authors father, Earl E. Cole for serving as a role model, mentor and friend. His mother Wanda J. Cole for being a mom, babysitter and so much more. His brother, Franklin D. Cole for showing me that it's never too late to go to school. The authors wife Jennie who showed me that it can be done regardless of how impossible it seems and his son Austin who brought back my childhood, I love you all. Last but not least the author would like to thank Mr. Frank Brown, retired District III supervisor and Mr. Bo Freeman, Sequatchie County Extension Leader for giving me time and support during this project. Also thanks to Sharon Davis, Graduate Assistant and the entire Department of Agricultural and Extension staff for making phone calls and completing other significant tasks thus helping me finish this project.

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to identify factors which influence teen participation in the Tennessee 4-H program. The focus group research method was employed in order to obtain the attitudes and opinions of former 4-H members regarding the 4-H program. Teenagers who were once involved in the 4-H program but currently are not involved were identified in eight rural counties in Tennessee. Rural teens were targeted because of their influence on the total enrollment figures. Nearly 70 percent of the total 4-H enrollment comes from rural areas or farms. These students were then contacted and asked to participate in the study.

Several major themes regarding the 4-H program emerged from the focus group sessions. First, students felt that 4-H programs were not adequately marketed to their age group. Second, the students felt that many 4-H programs and activities were not meeting their needs and interests. Third, the students stated that time was also a major barrier to teen participation in 4-H programs. Finally, the students stated that 4-H agents were not receiving the proper training required to work with older youth.

In conclusion, several recommendations about teen involvement in the Tennessee 4-H program can be made. Better

marketing of the current programs, new programs, more collaboration with the school systems (for in class time), and agent training and support all seem to be ways of increasing the retention of older youth in the 4-H program.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER

I.	INTRODUCTION.....	1
	Need for the Study.....	2
	Purpose of the Study.....	4
II.	REVIEW OF THE EXISTING LITERATURE.....	6
	Historical Background.....	6
	Four-H Member Characteristics.....	7
	Family Characteristics.....	8
	Four-H Incentives, Projects, and Competition.....	10
	Teen Perceptions and the 4-H Image.....	11
	Youth Interests and Dissatisfaction With 4-H.....	13
	Why Do Teens Drop Out?.....	14
III.	METHODS AND PROCEDURES.....	15
	Sample.....	15
	Justification of Method.....	16
	Instrument and Pilot Test.....	19
IV.	SUMMARY.....	20
	Questions.....	20
	Question 1.....	20
	Question 2.....	21
	Question 3.....	23
	Question 4.....	24
	Question 5.....	25

Question 6.....	26
Question 7.....	27
Question 8.....	28
Question 9.....	30
Question 10.....	31
Question 11.....	31
Question 12.....	32
V. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS.....	36
Summary.....	36
Marketing and Image.....	39
Teen Programs.....	40
Time.....	41
Agents.....	42
Comparison with Other Studies.....	42
Recommendations.....	44
Recommendations for Further Study.....	50
REFERENCES.....	53
APPENDIXES.....	58
APPENDIX A. QUESTIONNAIRE.....	59
APPENDIX B. LETTER TO PARTICIPANTS.....	60
APPENDIX C. PARENTAL CONSENT FORM.....	61
APPENDIX D. STUDENT CONSENT FORM.....	62
VITA.....	63

CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

The passage of the Smith-Lever Act in 1914 officially created the Cooperative Extension Service, an organization dedicated to serving people's needs by providing useful and practical information on subjects relating to Agriculture, Home Economics, Community Resource Development, and Youth Development. The Cooperative Extension Service's youth development program, 4-H, is perhaps the most recognized youth program in the world. Under the direction of the Cooperative Extension Service, 4-H uses several types of programs and projects in agriculture, home economics, leadership and related areas to help young people develop life skills. Wessel and Wessel (1982) state that "the mission of 4-H is to assist youth in acquiring knowledge, developing life skills, and forming attitudes that will enable them to become self-directing, productive and contributing members of society" (p.331).

Four-H youth enrollment data from 1994 shows that 5,600,087 youth worldwide participated in some type of 4-H program (USDA, 1995). In 1994 Tennessee reported an enrollment of 185,800 youth involved in 4-H programs (Tennessee Agricultural Extension Service [TAES] ,1995). Traditionally, the 4-H audience ranges from age from nine to 19 with a majority of the participants being nine to 12 in age. At the transition from age 12 to 13, 4-H has seen a

decline in enrollment. Four-H enrollment continues to drop into Senior level years (9-12 grades). This decline in 4-H enrollment has caused much concern within the Extension community. Why are older youth dropping out of 4-H?

Need for the Study

Like other Extension programs and services, 4-H is committed to meeting people's needs. The people targeted by 4-H have been identified as youth aged nine to 19. Four-H does a good job of reaching the younger age group, but retention of older youth in 4-H programs is low. Several studies have recognized that 4-H has a problem retaining the older youth in 4-H programs. Acosta and Holt (1991) stated that "Louisiana 4-H, as in some other states, has been faced with declining enrollment of youth ages 13 and over"(p.29). Forbes stated that there is a "significant and persistent loss of 4-H Club members in the teen years" (1992, p.37). In a California 4-H staff newsletter, McAllister and Cress (1986) addressed the loss of teenage members (and inquired about these phenomena.)

A recent study in Tennessee also noted that enrollment is declining among older 4-H members. The decline in enrollment from Junior level (5th-6th grade) to the Junior High level (7th-8th grade) dropped 38 percent over a five year period (Essington, 1995). Regional data in Tennessee has also shown

a decline in enrollment. Data from the 1992 District III (lower east Tennessee counties) Enrollment Report shows that retention is low among Junior High (7th-8th grade) and Senior (9th-12th grade) members (Jessee, 1993). Possible reasons for the low retention of senior 4-H members need to be identified so steps can be made to improve the program for this audience.

Data from 1994 showed that 4-H members age 14 and older make up only 11.2 percent of the entire 4-H enrollment in Tennessee (TAES 1995). The data also showed a decline from age 14 where enrollment was about 5 percent to age 17 and older where enrollment was less than 2 percent of the total 4-H population (TAES, 1995). Although the 4-H program in Tennessee has less than 2 percent of the total 4-H enrollment at the Senior High level, Tennessee Agricultural Extension Service data from 1995 showed that Extension spent many employee hours working with the Senior 4-H program. If so much time and effort is spent on this audience, why is retention so low? If the time and efforts spent on senior retention were shifted to another audience, how would this effect the senior retention numbers? Because Extension programs are funded by federal, state, and local dollars, decision makers with the Tennessee Agricultural Extension Service have an obligation to spend these resources as wisely as possible. Therefore it is important to determine if Senior retention can be increased and if so how.

In 1995 the Tennessee Agricultural Extension Service formed a Teen Priority Committee in order to address several issues related to teenagers and their involvement in 4-H programs. A major concern was the problem of retention in older 4-H members. The concern over the retention of the Senior 4-H audience in Tennessee prompted this study.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to determine factors which influence the retention of senior members in the Tennessee 4-H program. Findings of the study were used to determine if teen enrollment could be increased and to reveal ways this could be accomplished. Because rural and farm youth make up about 70 percent of the total 4-H enrollment in Tennessee, particular emphasis was given to these rural and farm youth who were once involved in the Tennessee 4-H program but for some reason dropped out when they entered their teen years. Specific objectives of this study were as follows:

- 1) To determine activities rural and farm teens prefer to participate in;
- 2) To determine reasons teens prefer these activities;
- 3) To determine what teens like and/or dislike about the current 4-H programs;

- 4) To inquire how their peers feel about 4-H;
- 5) To determine the reasons rural and farm teens join 4-H;
- 6) To determine the reasons rural and farm teens drop out of 4-H;
- 7) To determine what rural and farm teens think would improve Senior retention in the Tennessee 4-H program.

Because many teens drop out of 4-H during the transition from middle to high school, high school students (Senior 4-H aged youth) were targeted as the sample audience for this study. Focus group interviews were used in order to obtain information about the students attitudes and opinions concerning the 4-H program in Tennessee.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF EXISTING LITERATURE

Historical Background

The retention and enrollment of older youth in 4-H and similar youth organizations has been a long term problem across the nation. In 1934 C.B. Smith pointed out that " we are not unaware of the fact, however, that in club work, as in scout work, in church work, and in the schools, we lose many of our club members at the age of 15 or 16 and above. They drop out and we lose track of them ..." (Smith, 1934, p.1). Many studies, some dating back over 60 years, have addressed the problem of low retention and enrollment of senior aged 4-H members. When addressing the problem of low retention among senior 4-H members, McAuliffe, quoted a 1930 study by Garnett, who stated that " Apparently the sponsors of club work must reconcile themselves to its being confined chiefly to the younger age group, or else work out a better adapted or more challenging program for the older youth" (McAuliffe 1955). Jones (1947) addressed 4-H club work and high school youth and Sabrosky (1950) looked at ways to attain higher 4-H enrollment. In Tennessee, several studies have addressed

senior youth and problems with 4-H enrollment and retention. Wedgeworth (1980), Warren (1972), Rouse (1964), Nichols (1972), McClure (1971), Jeter (1971), Bailey (1980), Byerley (1972), and Smith (1982) all addressed the issue of junior and senior high 4-H enrollment and retention in selected Tennessee counties. Studies in Tennessee and other states have identified several factors which could play a role in the enrollment and retention of 4-H members. These studies revealed major factors which might influence retention of older 4-H members included member characteristics, family characteristics and influences, 4-H projects and incentives, students perceptions of 4-H, and youth interests.

Four-H Member Characteristics

One factor which is important when considering 4-H enrollment and retention is the background of the 4-H members. Because of the nature and history of 4-H work, a higher percentage of the youth attracted to traditional 4-H programs come from rural areas where agriculture is perhaps more noticeable in the community. Ellis and Henderson (1993) stated that 4-H enrollment levels are higher in rural counties with low youth populations. This also appears to be true in Tennessee. In Tennessee, 1994 data showed that 25,696 of the 185,800 4-H members live on farms (13.8%) while an additional

104,981 4-H members live in towns under 10,000 and open country (56.5%) (TAES, 1995). Together, the rural and farm 4-H population makes up about 70 percent of the total 4-H enrollment in Tennessee. Additionally, members come from small towns under 50,000 (30,257 or 16.3%), suburbs of more than 50,000 (3,714 or 2.0%), and cities of more than 50,000 (11.4% or 21,152) (TAES, 1995). Fewer and fewer 4-H members reside on farms, yet there is still a significant number of 4-H members living in rural areas. Because there is a high percentage of rural and farm participants in the Tennessee 4-H program, it is easy to see how they might influence enrollment and retention figures. Although an exact percentage of dropouts in rural counties is not known, 1995 Tennessee 4-H data indicates that many rural counties are experiencing a decline in 4-H enrollment at the junior and senior high level.

Family Characteristics

Several studies regarding 4-H enrollment and retention have established that family characteristics play an important role in 4-H participation. Maurer and Bokemeier (1984) found that parental participation in adult organizations influenced children to take part in youth organizations. They also determined that parents with a high income and level of education, had children who were more likely to participate in

youth organizations. Nefstead found that when mothers became employed and fathers were not involved in the 4-H program, youth were more likely to drop out of 4-H (1981). Caplinger (1984) stated that sibling involvement in 4-H and parents attendance and willingness to lead club meetings both had a positive influence on re-enrollment of eight to twelve year old 4-H members. Hartley found that the cooperation of parents and parental support influenced re-enrollment of first-year 4-H members (1983). Harmon (1986) determined that the Hispanic population in Imperial County, California did not enroll in 4-H in part because of lack of family support. Focus group research done by Cano and Bankston (1992) found that ethnic minority youth who were encouraged to join 4-H by their parents or other relatives were more likely to enroll. Scott, Clark, and Reagan (1990) found that parental encouragement and role models had a high relationship with 4-H project completion. Petroff (1984) also found that family participation was important to 4-H member retention. In a study of 4-H alumni, results showed that former 4-H members highly valued the inputs of family members during their 4-H membership (Ladewig and Thomas, 1987). Each of these studies showed that participation and/or support from family members is an important factor in keeping youth enrolled in 4-H programs.

Four-H Incentives, Projects and Competition

For many years the 4-H program has offered youth incentives for project participation which are designed to provide the students with an opportunity to "learn by doing". These incentives were also thought to encourage students to remain active in 4-H activities into their teen years. Project incentives include; ribbons, medals, educational trips, monetary prizes, and other awards. Research suggests that some success of incentives or lack thereof, can be linked with personality patterns. Forbes (1992, p.37) stated that "Perhaps one type of individual finds greater satisfaction in the incentive structure offered in 4-H, while others seek a different type of challenge." Scott et al (1990) found incentives to be highly correlated with project completion in 4-H clothing projects.

As the population continues to grow the number of projects offered in 4-H expands as well. In 1996, the Tennessee 4-H program offered over 45 different projects and programs for youth. The diversity of these projects is intended to appeal to a variety of youth in a society which continues to become more complex. However, Norland and Bennett (1993) found that there was a very low relationship between 4-H member satisfaction and the number and types of projects taken. Yet a recent study in Tennessee found that

4-H agents feel that awards and recognition possibilities along with scholarships, travel, and financial aid programs are some of the major strengths of our existing 4-H programs (Meadows, 1995).

Competition is a major part of the 4-H program. However, studies have shown that many youth have a negative perception of competition and the importance of competing in 4-H. A study at the Pennsylvania State University (PSU, 1974) found that youth had a negative attitude regarding the 4-H emphasis on competition and record keeping. Smith (1982) found that 4-H members liked to compete more than nonmembers. However, Smith and Collins (1988) stated that 4-H dropouts had a more positive attitude toward competition than members. Ladewig and Thomas (1987) found that 4-H alumni felt competition was one of the most popular forms of participation in 4-H. With contrasting data it is easy to determine that some youth like competition while others do not.

Teen Perceptions and the 4-H Image

Acosta and Holt (1991) noted that many teens seem to lose interest in 4-H activities which held their attention in the past, is this because programs in 4-H are perceived to be "old-fashioned" or "not cool" by modern teenagers? Meadows (1995) surveyed Extension personnel in Tennessee and found

that staff felt many youth held a negative perception of 4-H and this was a major weakness of the 4-H program. Personnel felt that youth perceived 4-H as being a little kid's club, for farming and cooking only, and not cool. Many teens may perceive 4-H as a club for farm kids who want to learn about cows and cooking. Holz-Clause and Jost (1995) found that many Iowa middle school students perceive agriculture as hard physical labor and that farmers typically wear bib overalls and chew on straw. Marketing Resources, Inc. (MRI, 1990) stated that the strongest image of 4-H with both youth and adults was an association with farming, agriculture, and county or state fairs. The report did find that the 4-H name was not a detriment to enrollment. MRI (1990) concluded by stating that 4-H needs to develop an effective way to change the rural image and promote programs that appeal to all children. Another study found that 4-H had a positive image with most teens (PSU, 1974). Petroff stated that 4-H should explore ways to broaden its appeal among youth (1984). A study of Hispanic youth found that perception was a barrier to 4-H enrollment (Harmon, 1986). Finally, Ladewig and Thomas (1987) stated that 4-H needed to enhance its visibility to all youth if growth in the program is desired.

The problem of negative perceptions in 4-H has been given much attention and as a result several studies have addressed the issue.

Youth Interests and Dissatisfaction with 4-H

4-H work can be thought of as a service to all youth who are interested in learning about agriculture, home economics, leadership or a number of related areas. In addition, 4-H will provide youth the opportunity to develop leadership, citizenship, or other important life skills. If the youth take advantage of the service offered, many will benefit. However, if the service does not appeal to the interests of older youth, they will not continue with the program. Morris and Company, Inc. (1992) stated that when programs offered meet the needs and interests of youth, they will participate. Studies have found that the main reason for youth dropping out of 4-H is due to dissatisfaction with some aspect of the program. Culbert (1983) found that older youth did not re-enroll in South Florida's 4-H program because of dissatisfaction with project books and 4-H club meetings. Youth also thought that 4-H activities were repetitious and not fun and stated that they had jobs or too much else to do. Scales (1972) found that 4-H members dropped out to participate in other activities. Rithcie and Resler (1993) found that teens disliked meetings and they had too many other interests such as jobs and sports. A focus group study conducted by MRI also found that former 4-H members disliked the meetings. The report states that "they (the meetings)

were described as long boring events where adults or older participants did all the talking" (MRI,1990,p.5). The study later determined that students preferred group activities that were fun. Ladewig and Thomas (1987) stated 4-H should strive to meet the diverse needs of all older youth.

Why Do Teens Drop Out?

As stated earlier, the problem of teenage retention in 4-H has been addressed by many through the history of 4-H work. Although many findings have been presented, no one method of retention has been clearly identified as being highly successful in retaining older members. It appears that a 4-H member is more likely to remain active in the 4-H program if he/she is having fun, receiving family support, likes incentives and project work, has a positive image of agriculture, and has friends who participate in 4-H.

CHAPTER III

METHODS AND PROCEDURES

Sample

Three focus groups were to be conducted in each of the three geographic regions in Tennessee (east, middle, and west) for a total of nine groups. However, due to a logistical conflict, one west Tennessee site was dropped for a total of eight focus groups. Different regions were selected because of the different perceptions the teens might have regarding the 4-H program in Tennessee. The study dealt with youth living in rural areas so it was important to define a rural area. This was done by referring to the Tennessee Statistical Abstract from 1991 which identified areas with little or no urban influence. Areas which were considered as having urban influence were excluded from the study. The remaining sites were then selected by random sample and Extension agents were contacted and asked to identify at least six to 10 former 4-H members who are eligible to participate in the Senior 4-H program (9th-12th grades). These individuals were then contacted by mail and informed of the study. Included in the mailed material was a parental consent form and a student consent form which was read and signed prior to participation

in the study. The letter and consent forms outlined the study and described the method employed to obtain information. It described the purpose of using the tape recorder and that the students had the right to refuse to answer any of the questions. The letter also noted that every effort to maintain the highest degree of confidentiality was to be made by the researcher.

Justification of Method

The research method employed in this study was the focus group method. Focus groups are a type of qualitative research method designed to provide researchers with information about peoples attitudes or ideas relating to a subject. The purpose of this study was to determine factors which influence the retention of senior members in the Tennessee 4-H program. By obtaining these opinions, researcher could then develop recommendations which can assist in changing these attitudes or opinions. Greenbaum stated that "when used appropriately, focus groups can be extremely effective in generating meaningful information about consumer attitudes toward a variety of topics" (1993, p.16). Focus groups originated in the 1930's when social scientists looked at nondirective individual interviewing which possessed limited assumptions and open-ended questions. Social scientists were looking for

an alternative to the close-ended interview method of conducting research. Krueger (1995) quoted Stuart R. Rice (1931) who stated that in the existing interview method "the subject plays more or less a passive role" and that "data obtained are likely to embody the perceived ideas of the interviewer as the attitude of the interviewee" (Krueger,1995). Apparently social scientists were wanting more input and interaction from participants who have ideas, opinions, and feelings about a subject. Morgan states that "The hallmark of focus groups is the explicit use of the group interaction to produce data and insights that would be less accessible without the interaction found in a group" (1988). A focus group is a carefully planned discussion designed to obtain perceptions about a defined area of interest in a permissive, non threatening environment. Focus group sessions typically last about one hour and are composed of six to ten participants who possess particular characteristics which relate to the topic of the focus group. These homogeneous participants are asked a set of open-ended questions and given time for discussion. Researchers record responses and identify similarities in participants responses. The similarities in responses, or patterns, are used to determine what participants think about a particular topic. Moderators also have an opportunity to probe answers to determine why a group or individual thinks a certain way.

Focus groups can improve the planning and design of new programs, provide a means of evaluating existing programs, and produce insights for developing marketing strategies for programs (Krueger, 1995). Other advantages of focus groups are; their results are more quickly obtained and high face validity exists with focus group results.

Because focus group research is a qualitative research method, there are many myths concerning the success of the method in conducting social science research. Morgan and Krueger (1993) address some of the more common concerns researchers might have about focus groups, other qualitative methods and their role in research. Qualitative methods have an advantage over quantitative methods when the research topic involves understanding the success or failure of a program. In a specific setting, focus groups may be the most efficient and effective tool for uncovering the reasons behind the outcome. Morgan and Krueger also state that when the goal of a study is to generate theories or explanations that focus groups are appropriate research tools. Morgan and Krueger (1993) continue with a statement from Yin who said that projects trying to answer "how" and "why" questions need different research methods than projects trying to answer "what" and "how many questions". Morgan and Krueger (1993) continue their justification of focus group research by stating that when the goal of research is to gain

specification rather than generalization, focus groups and other qualitative methods are likely to be preferred over quantitative methods.

One common way to derive information about a program is to use focus groups in conjunction with a quantitative method such as a questionnaire. Although this method is used it is not necessary. Focus groups alone will provide valid information about what people think and why they think it.

Instrument and Pilot Test

The instrument used in this study was a researcher developed series of questions. The format of these questions follows the guidelines for developing a focus group questionnaire specifically for youth outlined by Krueger (1995). Furthermore the questionnaire followed other suggestions made by Krueger such as avoiding closed-ended questions. After the instrument was developed, a pilot test was conducted and appropriate modifications were made.

CHAPTER IV

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

As stated in Chapter I, the purpose of this study was to determine factors which influence the retention of seniors in the Tennessee 4-H program. A major goal was to take this information and use it to determine how Extension agents in Tennessee can increase the enrollment of teens in the 4-H program. The following is a summary of the results of eight focus groups conducted across the state. The type of summary will be an interpretive summary which is described by Krueger (1994) as a summary which describes the content and meaning of the data.

Questions

Question 1

Let's begin by having each of you tell us your name and some of the activities or clubs you are involved with.

There were two major purposes for asking this question. The first reason being to simply allow the students to get comfortable with the research team and with each other.

The second purpose for this question was to record the types of activities in which teens are currently involved. Several recurring answers were given to this question. The teens

quickly identified sports of various types and levels as an extracurricular activity in which they are involved. Also church and related religious activities emerged as a major activity for teens. When collected, school related clubs (Beta, FFA, FHA, English, etc.) also emerged as an activity in which teens are participating. Jobs were also mentioned by several of the students as being an extracurricular activity. Past research (Culbert 1983, Scales 1972, etc.) regarding teen retention has found that many teens drop out of 4-H because they have little time to stay involved. However it is interesting to note that most of the students stated they were involved with more than one activity. Some specific responses were:

School Cheerleading Team and Gymnastics Club

Church and FFA

Baseball, Alpha Zeta, Drama Club, and English Club

Basketball, volleyball, track, Just Say No

In conclusion, most of the students are involved with sports, church, school related clubs, and jobs. Also most of the teens are active in more than one activity.

Question 2

Think about a club called 4-H and tell me about some of the activities you participated in as a 4-H member.

The purpose of this question was to determine what 4-H

activities the teens remembered participating in and to help the teens focus their thoughts on 4-H. This question was also used to gain insight on the students' opinion about these activities. The students identified several 4-H activities from bread baking to camp. Contests immediately stood out as an activity. The contests students mentioned most often were posters, public speaking and bread baking. Students also identified judging teams as being a 4-H activity in which they were involved. Camp was another activity mentioned as was project books to a lesser degree. Again, when students mentioned an activity many times they would attach a negative or positive feeling towards that activity. Some of the statements were:

4-H camp was a blast!

Always made a poster about milk (negative tone)

Agent gave us those books, we never used them

Making bread and working with cows

The responses in question two helped determine what activities the teens remembered doing and to a degree how they felt about these activities. The question also provided a smooth transition into the following set of questions. Again, the students mentioned various contests (bread, poster, public speaking, etc.), judging teams, and camp as being the 4-H activities in which they were participants.

Question 3

What are some of the things you liked about 4-H?

By asking this question the researcher could build on the responses given in question two. Most students had already stated that they liked 4-H camp. This question also allowed the researcher to determine the activities which would be important in retaining 4-H members. Not surprisingly, most students liked 4-H because it got them out of class. Initially the researcher felt that this response had little or nothing to do with the study. However, after further analysis it was determined that this response indeed had meaning to this study. The students enjoyed the opportunity to do something different during school hours. Specific responses related to this were:

I liked getting out of class/something different

It was fun getting out of class

4-H got us out of class

This response of "getting out of class" is also important because it infers that students appear to associate 4-H with the school system. In Tennessee the 4-H program has strong ties with the schools but there are several out of class activities which are offered in 4-H. Other likes included 4-H camp and livestock projects such as the chick chain, sheep shows, and related programs. When the 4-H club activities (bread baking, public speaking, photo search, etc.) are placed

together they too make up activities which the teens liked. However, it should be noted that when listed alone none of these activities were mentioned often by the groups.

In conclusion the students enjoyed getting out of class, going to 4-H camp, participating in livestock projects, and to a slight degree the club activities were also liked.

Question 4

What did you like about these activities?

This question was asked in order to develop an understanding of why students like particular activities. Understanding why the teens liked these activities could help determine what types of activities should be offered in the future to attract teens. The students stated that they liked getting out of class because they could do something different. The students also identified winning, competition, and challenges as being reasons for liking some of the activities. The 4-H program places emphasis on competition and anyone who participates is rewarded. Therefore it would appear that these teens would enjoy 4-H and stay active. However, these were all former 4-H members who had dropped out. Students also liked activities because they were fun, informative, different, and gave them a chance to meet other youth.

Specific responses were:

The survival skills at camp was a challenge

It was fun to bake bread

I like talking, so speeches were fun for me

Camp was way cool

Students stated they liked the competition, winning, and challenges that the 4-H activities provided them. They also liked doing different things which were fun and provided them with opportunities to meet others and learn.

Question 5

What are some of the things you did not like about 4-H?

The purpose of this question was to determine what things teens remember not liking about the 4-H program. The students stated several things they did not like about the 4-H program. First, many students did not like the 4-H club structure because it seemed boring, too strict and there was no time to do fun things. Some students said that:

We sat in the club and listened to her (agent) talk

(Agent) too strict, wouldn't let you talk

Officer election was a popularity contest

We got books and didn't know what to do with them

Also students mentioned that there was a lack of seriousness from teachers and students regarding the 4-H program. About the same number of students disliked club activities (bread

baking, speeches, etc.) as those who stated they liked club activities. Several students made statements like:

No one ever took 4-H seriously

Other students did not cooperate, they made fun of 4-H, etc.

I never baked bread, that's stupid

In summary question five provided several points to consider about the way the 4-H club and activities are conducted. Students did not like the structure of the 4-H club and the lack of seriousness from teachers and other students. Specific activities were not attacked just the manner in which those activities were conducted.

Question 6

What did you not like about these activities?

The purpose of this question was to determine what students did not like about the activities mentioned in question five. Again the answers given in question 5 spilled over into this question. However, this question did bring forth several new issues to consider. First, the students stated there were too many rules associated with the contests and club activities and these rules often limited participation. The students also felt that officers and other 4-H activities lacked a purpose. Several students asked why Extension agents changed every year and that this was a reason not to like 4-H. Other responses were:

They (agents) made us do the activities

Activities were either real fun or real boring

Are agents supposed to change each year?

Posters always dealt with farm stuff

**We wanted to do something, it's our club not theirs
(agent)**

It was interesting that students remembered specific rules of the contests and did not understand the purpose of the activities. None the less, this is what they thought.

In summary, the teens felt that many 4-H activities had too many rules and that many of the 4-H activities lacked a purpose. Other reasons for not liking activities were pressure to participate from agents, agent turnover, and to a lesser degree the farming image.

Question 7

What was the major reason for you joining 4-H?

As stated earlier, the Tennessee 4-H program has a strong association with the school systems. Therefore it was not surprising to find that many of the teens completed an enrollment card during elementary school and that all students were 4-H members. This question links back to the students' stating that 4-H lacked a purpose. They stated that:

Everyone joined, we did not have a choice

If you were in 4th or 5th grade you joined

We did not understand 4-H, we just did it

Also these statements reinforce the students negative opinion about being pressured into participating in activities. Some students did say they joined for other reasons which were to be involved in new activities, participate in livestock shows, and have fun. Other statements related to why students joined 4-H were:

4-H was the first opportunity to do something in school (activity)

I like being around animals

I wanted to show my horse

We got to take trips with friends

The purpose of this question was to determine what reasons students had for joining 4-H. Again, several teens did not see a reason beyond the issue of enrollment. This dilemma lead into the next question dealing with teen retention.

Question 8

Why do you think that some teens decide not to stay involved with 4-H?

In support of existing literature (Meadows 1995) related to teen retention the youth stated that 4-H activities were childish and elementary. The students also felt that 4-H had a bad image with their peers. Teens also stated they were too busy with other things such as jobs or sports. The other themes were "4-H was not fun", and "there was not enough contact with the 4-H program or agent in high school". Most

students thought that 4-H ended in 8th grade and that FFA was the agricultural based program for high school students.

Responses related to this question were:

It is an elementary thing

It's not cool, if you are involved your not cool

The activities are for little kids

If you're in it you'll be made fun of

Students also indicated that 4-H was not offered in their school or they did not know about 4-H in school and they had no time to participate after school because of jobs or other activities. Students stated that:

Don't know about 4-H (not informed)

We don't have it in high school, I think it's not offered

I never see our agent in school

We don't have time

I would go to 4-H if it was in school

Most students felt the major reasons why teens drop out of 4-H were because the activities are childish, boring and not cool. They also showed a lack of knowledge about the 4-H program and activities offered in high school as well as a lack of contact with the agents. Other activities (jobs, sports, etc.) also take high school students away from 4-H.

Question 9

What do your friends think of 4-H?

Once again this question has been touched on with the students responses to question eight. Several teens stated they felt their peers dropped out because 4-H is not cool. This theme quickly emerged in this question. The teens said they felt their friends do not like 4-H and that the program was for younger children or misfits (nerds). Many teens also indicated that their friends are apathetic and do not care anything about 4-H. Some responses were:

If you're in it you don't brag, if your not you don't care

They think it's stupid and dirty

We don't talk about it (apathetically)

It's for nerds and geeks

On the flip side, some of the teens felt their friends have a more positive image of 4-H. For example, the teens said that some of their friends liked 4-H and that it was good in helping students get scholarships for college. The comments were:

It can help you go to college

4-H can help you get scholarships

My friends have a positive image of 4-H, it was fun

Although these comments were not as common, they did show that some teens have a positive image of 4-H. However, the

childish image of 4-H still stood out when these comments were made, reinforcing the idea that many teens feel 4-H is for a younger audience.

Question 10

Do you have any friends who still belong to a 4-H club?

The purpose of this question was to determine the level of discussion teens have with their peers about 4-H and to determine if these teens still had friends involved with the 4-H program. Several teens said they did not have a friend involved in 4-H and only a few teens still had friends involved in 4-H. Surprisingly, only a few students were not sure if they had a friend involved. Apparently teens pay close attention to not only their activities but those of others.

Question 11

Overall, what do you think of 4-H?

At this point of the focus groups the students and researcher had candidly discussed several issues related to 4-H ranging from the 4-H clubs to their peers' impressions of 4-H. The purpose of this question was to determine what the students thought about the total 4-H program. Although the majority of the teens were critical of 4-H on several issues they overwhelmingly thought that 4-H was a good program. This

was once again laced with the idea that 4-H is for younger children and it is important to note most of the teens were a little apathetic about their answers. Some of the comments made by the teens seemed to be given out of politeness. Some examples of this were:

It's o.k. I guess

Good for Elementary (kids)

It's o.k. but it needs to be worked on

It's a nice program, but it needs to be more mature

When asked, nearly all of the teens said 4-H needs to change the programs and activities offered to senior high students. This probing question helped lead students into the final question of the focus group.

Question 12

What do you think should be done to keep teens involved in 4-H?

The purpose of this study was to determine factors which influence senior retention in 4-H and this question is designed to help determine some approaches the Tennessee 4-H program leaders could consider in the battle to increase senior retention. With the posing of this question some overwhelmingly strong themes emerged. First the teens stated that 4-H needs to spend time marketing the program to the senior audience. The idea of marketing was addressed with

responses such as:

Agents need to tell students about 4-H

Tell them (students) about the programs

Better marketing

Many of the teens expressed that most of the 4-H activities lacked a purpose, this could be attributed to the lack of marketing. The strong theme of marketing can be compounded by other responses related to senior retention which included taking trips, and learning about career opportunities. The senior 4-H program in Tennessee places a high emphasis on trips and learning about career choices. This could indicate these students did not have a sound understanding of the current senior 4-H program and the activities offered. This dilemma could be attributed in part to a lack of marketing with this audience. Students also strongly suggested that 4-H offer programs which better meet their needs. Examples of this were:

More mature activities

Offer programs we want to do

Get more interesting stuff for High School students

Students were not interested in doing the same activities which were offered to younger youth and wanted programs that were more suited for their lifestyles. Another theme that emerged was that students thought 4-H would keep more seniors active by offering programs during school. This comment was

made in response to the lack of time issue many teens expressed. They made statements such as:

**You won't pick 4-H over sports, etc., do it
(4-H) during school**

All high school students want to work

**4-H can't compete with other (after school)
activities**

For many Extension agents offering programs during school hours is not an option. Many schools are now under the block scheduling system and cannot afford to let students out of class to participate in 4-H. However, as will be discussed in the next chapter there are some viable alternatives when dealing with this dilemma. One final major theme which emerged with this question was the issue of the agent who is working with the teens. Several of the teens felt that if agents were better trained to work with older youth the 4-H program could increase retention. Students made several comments related to the agents such as:

**Agent should be more like a friend than a
teacher**

We need to be treated like adults not kids

**Agents should remember what it's like to be a
teen**

The 4-H image also emerged from this question but to a lesser degree than the previous responses. Perhaps the issue of image could be tied to the question of marketing in the 4-H programs. In conclusion the teens felt that marketing,

programs offered, and when these programs were offered were major issues to consider when looking at ways to increase senior retention in the 4-H program.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary

Throughout its' history, 4-H along with other youth organizations has experienced a decline in enrollment and retention among older youth. The challenge of retaining and enrolling more teenage members has become a priority in the Tennessee 4-H program. The purpose of this study was to determine the factors influencing the retention of Senior 4-H members in Tennessee. A rural audience was examined because of the rural and farm member influence on the total 4-H enrollment figures (nearly 70 percent) in Tennessee. Eight rural counties across Tennessee were selected to participate in this study. The focus group research method was employed in order to obtain teens' ideas, opinions and perceptions about the Tennessee 4-H program. For this study, the researcher developed a focus group questioning route according to guidelines discussed by Krueger (1994). Extension agents in each selected county were contacted and asked to identify at least 6 to 10 high school aged students who were former 4-H members. The students were then contacted and asked to participate in the study. After review of the answers

provided by the youth who participated in this study several conclusions related to the issue of senior retention in the Tennessee 4-H program can be made. The following is a summary of the information provided by the teens.

Most teens were involved with many activities both inside and outside the school system. The majority of these activities were sports, church, school related clubs and jobs. Teens remembered being involved with several 4-H activities such as contests of various types, judging teams, and camp. They stated that camp, livestock projects, and club activities were 4-H activities they remember liking. Also students enjoyed getting out of formal classes to participate in 4-H activities. The teens enjoyed the competition, winning, and the challenges these activities provided. Most teens stated they did not like the structure of the 4-H club and that there seemed to be a lack of seriousness exhibited by the teachers and students regarding the 4-H program. The reasons teens did not like the 4-H activities were because there were too many rules associated with the contests and the activities often lacked a noticeable purpose. Most of the students enrolled in 4-H because it was offered during school and their friends were involved with 4-H. The issues of blanket enrollment and the agents pressuring students to participate were also noted as being dislikes. Some students did join to be involved with the activities offered in 4-H. Teens stated that their peers

did not stay involved with the 4-H program because they were busy and the programs were boring and designed for younger audiences. The students also revealed they did not have much information about 4-H and the programs 4-H offers to senior high audiences. Most of the teens felt 4-H was for younger children and that 4-H programs did not meet their needs. Some of the teens realized that 4-H does have benefits for older students but the majority stated that 4-H was not a concern and in general, was not for high school students. Most students did not have friends who were still involved in a 4-H program although most of the students thought 4-H was a good program (for younger audiences). Finally, the students thought that the 4-H program needed to focus on marketing, better programs for teens, the time these programs are offered to the students, and agent training, if retention in the program was to be increased. This was essentially the consensus across all the focus groups in each region of Tennessee.

Based on the information provided by the teens, four major issues related to 4-H and the retention of the senior audience should be addressed. These issues are areas which could have a positive impact on teen retention in the Tennessee 4-H program. The first major issue addresses the marketing of 4-H programs and the 4-H image. The second issue deals with the types of programs offered to teens. The third

issue addresses time and how the 4-H program can compete with other programs and activities. The final issue addresses 4-H agents and teen perceptions concerning agents. Each issue overlaps the other and some issues will be more easily addressed than others.

Marketing and Image

Teens identified marketing as a major area to address in order to increase retention in the 4-H program. The students noted a lack of purpose in the 4-H program, a lack of contact time with the 4-H agent, and a lack of knowledge concerning 4-H activities and programs. Students also held a strong perception of 4-H programs being designed for younger children. These are all issues related to marketing and image.

Students showed a definite lack of knowledge related to the purpose of the programs and activities offered in 4-H. Students also determined that many of the teens lack an understanding of the activities and programs offered in the 4-H program.

Another marketing related issue is the lack of contact between the teen audience and the 4-H agent. Because 4-H programs are offered in school for younger children many 4-H agents spend time preparing and delivering programs to

that audience. Also many agents are not meeting the senior audience in school therefore many of the students do not make a personal contact with the 4-H agent.

Image has been a concern with the 4-H program for many years. In other studies the farm image has been a major theme but that was not the case with this study. A few of the students mentioned the farm image but most identified the image of 4-H being a club for younger children as a concern which needed attention.

Teen Programs

Teens also stated that many of the 4-H programs did not appeal to them. They stated that these programs were too childish and not interesting to older youth. This issue has two areas which should be addressed. First the Tennessee 4-H program needs to address the issue of marketing. As stated earlier, many of the teens did not have a clear understanding of the types of activities and programs offered to the senior audience. This was documented in the last chapter when teens said they wanted to take trips and learn about career opportunities. Apparently the teens did not know that trips and career exploration are two major activities offered to teens in the Tennessee 4-H program. Perhaps the Tennessee 4-H program is offering the things which interest teens and they

are not aware of it. If however, it is determined that the teens are not interested in the current 4-H programs then some new programs designed to meet the needs and interests of teens should be implemented. If this is the case, then the marketing of these new programs will once again become an issue.

Time

Most of the teens stated they would be involved in the 4-H program if they had more time. Many said that 4-H should be offered during school hours. The teens said several of the students would come to a 4-H meeting because they could get out of class and the students might decide that they like 4-H once they are there. This is an excellent recommendation except for the problem of having 4-H in school. In Tennessee and several other states high schools utilize the block scheduling system. This is a system which does not allow time for many extracurricular activities such as 4-H. Therefore, if 4-H puts an emphasis on working with teens during school hours, much thought must be placed on how this is to be accomplished.

Agents

The students also discussed the Extension agent as someone who could make an impact on the retention of teens in the 4-H program. Most of the teens had negative perceptions regarding agents. They remembered agents as being controlling in the classroom and not giving the students an opportunity to share their ideas. They also perceived agents as individuals who pressured them to participate in activities they were not interested in doing. Teens said they wanted agents to be more understanding of their concerns. They also wanted someone who could be a friend and a teacher. They felt the agents did not care about working with teens or their opinions. They also thought that agents did not want to take time to work with them.

Comparison with Other Studies

Many of the findings from this study were similar to the findings of other studies reviewed in Chapter II. Each of these studies had findings which fall into one or more of the previously mentioned areas (Marketing, Programs, Time and Agents). For example, Ladewig and Thomas (1987) determined that 4-H needed to enhance its' visibility (i.e. marketing) to all youth if growth in the program is desired. Acosta and

Holt (1991) found that many teens lose interest in 4-H activities which held their attention in the past (i.e. programs). Meadows (1995) noted that Extension agents working with the 4-H program felt youth perceived 4-H as a little kids' club, for farming and cooking only and not cool (i.e. marketing). Scales (1972) found that teens dropped out of 4-H to participate in other activities (i.e. time). Petroff (1984) stated that 4-H programs should explore ways to broaden its appeal among youth (i.e. marketing and programs). Morris and Company Inc. (1992) noted that if programs meet the needs and interests of older youth, they will participate. A study from the Pennsylvania State University (1974) found that youth held a negative perception of the 4-H emphasis on competition and record keeping (i.e. programs). Culbert (1983) also found that youth did not re-enroll in 4-H because of their dissatisfaction with the project books and club meetings. The youth felt that the 4-H activities were too repetitious and not fun and that they had jobs or too much else to do (programs and time). Finally, a study by Marketing Resources, Inc. (1990) found that former 4-H members disliked the club meetings.

In conclusion, the areas of marketing, time, and programs have been identified by youth as possible deterrents to re-enrollment in a 4-H program. Although agents were not mentioned in any of the previously mentioned studies as

deterrents to re-enrollment, it should be noted that the agent has the responsibility of marketing and delivering these programs to older youth. If there is a lack of training and support the efforts of agents could be limited.

Recommendations

The purpose of this study was to identify factors which would influence teen retention in the 4-H program. Several factors have been identified with four factors being paramount. The recommendations to increase retention can be even further simplified.

The 4-H agent is the foundation of any county 4-H program. Program success is determined by agent performance and that performance is hopefully enhanced by training received from the county, district, and state level. Therefore, it is essential that each agent be adequately prepared to work with each audience level (explorer, junior, junior high, and senior). It is apparent that 4-H agents need additional training which will assist them in successfully working with the teen audience. Agents will also need new curriculum materials and new ideas about how to approach this audience. For reasons previously mentioned, the most difficult audience with which to work is the teen audience. Yet, not all of the recommendations will be directed towards

the senior audience.

For example, the teens felt that 4-H lacked a purpose. This issue should be addressed in the early years of a students' 4-H program. Agents need to provide the students with a clear understanding of the goals and purpose of the 4-H program while they are still active. If the students see a purpose or worth in the activity they will be more likely to stay actively involved. This too will assist in dealing with the issue of lack of understanding of the types of programs offered in 4-H. It should be noted that the agents themselves might not have a clear understanding of the purpose of these activities. This is why proper training in 4-H programming could be needed. In short, the agent will be required to spend more time communicating purpose and marketing programs to the students. Hopefully, this effort will help develop a better understanding for the 4-H member. Once the students understand the types of programs and activities offered they might decide that 4-H does indeed offer interesting and beneficial programs. If the students determine that these programs do not meet their needs or that the programs seem too immature, then some decisions about new programs should be made. This is apparently the case because most of the teens stated that the 4-H program was seen as a club for younger children. The students stated that they enjoyed being active and doing fun things which did not include sitting quietly and

listening to others talk. There was a strong negative perception around the 4-H club. Perhaps this is where the idea of new programs and activities should begin. In order to successfully conduct programs for an older audience agents will need training in using new and different curriculum materials which should appeal to older youth. If no new materials exist, then a strong effort should be made to develop new materials. Agents also need to promote a positive caring image and provide the students with an opportunity to express their own ideas. This will also require more training in working with older youth.

The agents need to emphasize the purpose of 4-H and what activities are offered. They also need to consider new programs for older audiences who are not interested in the current programs and market these programs in a manner that is appealing to the teens. These programs need to provide teens with fun activities where interaction with others is encouraged. The agents also need to address the teens in a different manner than younger youth. Students in high school are very different from grade school students.

Because of the difficulty in working with teens during school hours many senior 4-H programs have club meetings after school. This causes a problem with students who participate in other activities. As stated earlier, most students are involved with other activities. Therefore, it is difficult to

maintain participation in 4-H and continue with these other activities. Most students felt that 4-H could not compete with other activities and that 4-H needed to be offered during school. Most 4-H agents do not see this as an option. However, if the agents were to make a greater effort to work in the high schools and develop a collaborative approach with teachers and administrators, this issue could be addressed. Also the Tennessee 4-H program could help foster this effort by developing more ties with the state board of education as well as providing agents with curriculum which would enhance what the students are studying in school. This could also help with the marketing of the 4-H program. If the teachers and administrators see a worth in the program they too will decide to participate. Agents will again need materials and training if this recommendation is to be successfully implemented.

In summary there are four major issues related to teen retention in the Tennessee 4-H program. If students are to remain active in 4-H they need to have programs that meet their needs and interests. These programs should be designed and marketed in a way that is appealing to their age group. Programs do not have to be offered during school, but the agent needs to make an effort to adequately expose 4-H and the programs to this audience. Also the agents need support from the state level with training and materials that will assist

in working with this audience.

With this in mind, the Tennessee 4-H program should:

1. Develop new programs designed for teens. A prime example of a new program would be the Sigma Lamda Chi 4-H organization developed by the University of Georgia Cooperative Extension Service. Sigma Lamda Chi 4-H is targeted toward students who are not attracted to a more traditional 4-H program. Yet, the program emphasizes service, leadership, and citizenship as does the more traditional program.

2. Market these new programs. Marketing of these new programs should encompass several methods or strategies. First, these programs should emphasize fun activities. Students stated the traditional 4-H program did not allow time for fun activities. By giving senior 4-H members fun social activities thru programs like Sigma Lamda Chi 4-H, the image of the total 4-H program will change. Also these programs need to give 4-H members the opportunity to have ownership in the club. Giving ownership will allow students to feel as though the club or program is actually theirs not the Extension agents. Letting 4-H members decide what activities they want (within the program guidelines) and allowing them to plan and conduct these activities will enable the program to grow and become

more acceptable and appealing to senior aged 4-H members.

3. Foster collaboration with schools. The Tennessee 4-H program is quite successful in working with and through elementary and middle schools. However, when students enter high school there is little or no opportunity to operate the 4-H program during school hours. This presents a barrier to working with the senior audience but there are some alternatives to consider. Four-H offers many projects and programs which could supplement classroom instruction. In addition, 4-H agents are trained in a variety of disciplines and have the resources to assist senior students in a variety of ways. For example, students in classes such as Economics, Family Life, Biology and Home Economics could benefit from the expertise of an agent. Teachers and agents could work together to develop a more comprehensive educational experience for the seniors. By serving as a guest lecture in the classroom agents could make great progress in promoting the 4-H program. This potential opportunity should begin by agents offering their resources to teachers and informing teachers of the many Extension resources available. This will help promote 4-H and develop future opportunities to promote the 4-H program. In the future, the opportunity for teacher in-service related to 4-H could develop. This would be a prime opportunity to give teachers 4-H materials and programs to use during class. The teachers would then serve as 4-H in

class volunteer leaders.

4. Provide training and support for county 4-H agents. As stated earlier, before new programs are to be implemented, old programs need to be evaluated. Many 4-H agents work with programs that place a great deal of demand on their time. Adding additional programs might compound this problem and cause agents to face more time management concerns. Once these programs are evaluated, ones which seem to no longer be needed should be discontinued. Also, many agents have little or no training on working with youth. In order to be successful, 4-H agents need to develop a better understanding of their audience. This should be done by offering formal coursework, in-services, and other professional development opportunities.

Recommendations for Further Study

This study has identified issues which need to be addressed in order to increase senior retention in the Tennessee 4-H program. However this study has not answered all of the questions regarding this dilemma. Several other issues related to senior retention should be addressed. Some specific recommendations for further study are:

- 1) To determine perceptions of teachers and administrators concerning the Senior 4-H audience
- 2) To determine which current 4-H programs are no longer needed
- 3) To determine how to restructure the 4-H club
- 4) To determine what type of training would be most beneficial to 4-H agents

If the 4-H program is to continue as the largest youth organization in the world the current programs and their formats, delivery methods, and marketing techniques must be examined. It is unrealistic to think that all teens will stay involved in the 4-H program but it is feasible to think that a greater percentage of these teens could and will remain active if the programs offered meet their needs and interests, are presented in an appealing way and are presented by someone who understands teens.

REFERENCES

REFERENCES

- Acosta, D.T. and Holt, B.A. (1991). Give teens the programs they want...and need. Journal of Extension, XXIX, pp.29-30.
- Bailey, J.M. (1980). Parential Feelings Regarding Factors Influencing and Benefits Derived from 4-H Club Participation by Junior High and Senior High Age Members and Former Members of Grundy County, Tennessee. Unpublished Masters Thesis, The University of Tennessee, Knoxville.
- Byerly, M. (1972). Factors Which Influence the 4-H Membership Status of the Ninth and Tenth Grade Girls in Bradley County, Tennessee. Unpublished Masters Thesis, The University of Tennessee, Knoxville.
- Cano, J. and Bankston, J. (1992). Factors Which Influence Participation and Non-Participation of Ethnic Minority Youth in Ohio 4-H Programs. Journal of Agricultural Education, 33, (1), pp. 23-29.
- Caplinger, C.L. (1984). Factors Related to Reenrollment of 4-H of Eight-Through Twelve-Year-Old Members. Unpublished Doctoral Dissertation, The Ohio State University, Columbus.
- Culbert, D.F. (1983). Factors Contributing to Nonreenrollment of 4-H Club Members in Southeastern Florida. Unpublished Masters Thesis, The University of Florida, Gainesville.
- Ellis, A. and Henderson, J.L. (1993). Factors Associated with 4-H Enrollment Levels in the Alabama Cooperative Extension Service. Journal of Agricultural Education, 34, (1), pp. 11-17.
- Essington, D. (1995). The Image of 4-H as Perceived by Selected Tennessee Seventh Graders. Unpublished Masters Thesis, The University of Tennessee, Knoxville.
- Forbes, S. (1992). The 4-H Incentive System. Journal of Extension, XXX, p. 37.
- Greenbaum, T.L. (1993). The Handbook for Focus Group Research. New York: Lexington Books.

- Hamilton, S.K. (1970). Factors Related to 4-H Membership Status of Ninth and Tenth Grade Girls in Greene County, Tennessee. Unpublished Masters Thesis, The University of Tennessee, Knoxville.
- Harmon, M.W. (1986). Factors Limiting Hispanic Involvement in 4-H. Unpublished report presented to the faculty of the School of Education, San Diego State University, San Diego, CA.
- Hartley, R.S. (1983). Keeping 4-H Members. The Journal of Extension, XXI, pp. 19-24.
- Holz-Clause, M. and Jost, M. (1995). Using Focus Groups to Check Youth Perceptions in Agriculture. Journal of Extension, XXXIII, pp. 11-16.
- Jessee, C.M. (1993). Adolescence: A study of Needs and Programs. Unpublished paper, The University of Tennessee, Knoxville.
- Jeter, R.N. (1971). Factors Related to 4-H Membership Status and Selected Characteristics of Ninth Grade Girls in Blount County, Tennessee. Unpublished Masters Thesis, The University of Tennessee, Knoxville.
- Jones, H. and others. (1947). 4-H Club Work and High School Youth. Review of Extension Research, 4-H Circular 9, 1947.
- Krueger, R.A. (1994). Focus Groups: A practical guide for applied research. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Ladewig, H. and Thomas, J.K. (1987). Assessing the Impact on Former 4-H Members. The 4-H Alumni Study. Texas Agricultural Experiment Station, Texas A & M University, College Station. (ERIC Document No. 282 681).
- Marketing Resources, Inc. (1990). Final Report: 1990 4-H Surveys. Okland Park,KS.
- Maurer, R.C. and Bokemeirer, J.L. (1984). How Mom and Dad Influence Participation. The Journal of Extension, XXII, pp. 19-23.
- Meadows, D.G. (1995). Priority Program for Senior (Teen 4-H) Members. Unpublished State-wide Questionnaire, The University of Tennessee Agricultural Extension Service.

- McAllister, T. and Cress, F. (1986). 4-H and Its Loss of Teenage Members: Why? 4-H Staff Newsletter, Cooperative Extension Service, The University of California, Berkeley.
- McAuliffe, J. (1955). An Evaluation of the Experimental 4-H Club Project Teenage Talkover in Rennselaer County, New York. Unpublished Masters Thesis, The University of Maryland, College Park.
- McClure, J.P. (1972). Factors Related to 4-H Membership Status of Ninth and Tenth Grade Boys in Greene County, Tennessee. Unpublished Masters Thesis, The University of Tennessee, Knoxville.
- Morgan, D.L. (1988). Focus Groups as Qualitative Research. (Sage University Paper Series on Qualitative Research Methods, Vol. 16) Beverly Hills, CA.
- Morgan, D.L. (1993). Successful Focus Groups: Advancing the state of the art. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- Morris and Company (1992). What Young Adolescents Want and Need from Out-of-School Programs: A Focus Group Report. Bethesda, MD.
- Nefstead, S.P. (1981). 4-H Participation in Waseca County, Minnesota. Unpublished Masters Thesis, The University of Minnesota, St. Paul.
- Nichols, J.F. (1972). Influence of Selected Factors of 4-H Participation by Seventh, Eighth, and Ninth Grade Boys in Bledsoe County, Tennessee. Unpublished Masters Thesis, The University of Tennessee, Knoxville.
- Norland, E. and Bennett, M.B. (1993). Youth Participation-Factors Related to Older Member Satisfaction with 4-H. Journal of Extension, XXXI, pp. 15-17.
- Pennsylvania State University. (1974). Study of 4-H Youth and 4-H Programming. Extension Studies 49.
- Petroff, A.R. (1984). Attitudinal Differences: A Study Comparing 4-H Members and Dropouts, Ages 13 to 15 in 16 Montana Counties. Unpublished Masters Thesis, The Montana State University, Bozeman.
- Ritchie, R.M. and Resler, K.M. (1993). Why Youth Drop Out of 4-H. Journal of Extension, XXXI, pp. 37-38.

- Rouse, W. (1964). Factors Influencing Retention of Senior 4-H Boys in Hamilton County, Tennessee. Unpublished Masters Thesis, The University of Tennessee, Knoxville.
- Sabrosky, L.K. (1950). Going Up? Ways to Reach Our Goal of Higher 4-H Enrollment. Review of Extension Research, July, 1950.
- Scales, M. (1972). Involvement and Programming, the Keys to Making the Best better Through Longer Participation. The University of Kentucky Cooperative Extension Service, Extension Rural Sociology.
- Scott, D.H., Clark, V.L. and Reagan, S. (1990). Helping Participants Complete What They Start. Journal of Extension, XXVIII,
- Smith, C.B. (1934). How Further May We Develop Our Rural Youth Work in the United States. Extension Service Circular 198, Washington, D.C. : USDA, June, 1934.
- Smith, K.M. (1982). Selected Factors Related to 4-H Membership, Participation, and Retention of Eighth Grade Students in Bradley County, Tennessee. Unpublished Masters Thesis, The University of Tennessee, Knoxville.
- Smith, K.L. and Collins, C. (1988). Attitudes Toward Competition in a Youth Organization. Journal of the American Association of Teacher Educators in Agriculture, XXIX, (2), pp. 40-48.
- Tennessee Agricultural Extension Service (1995). Some Tennessee 4-H Facts. Special Publication No. 249.
- United States Department of Agriculture. 4-H Youth Enrollment Report Fiscal Year 1994.
- Warren, W.A. (1972). Influence of Selected Factors on Level of Participation by Seventh, Eighth, and Ninth Grade Boys and Girls in Cannon County, Tennessee. Unpublished Masters Thesis, The University of Tennessee, Knoxville.
- Wedgeworth, J.W. (1980). Factors Influencing the Retention of 4-H Club Members Through the Seventh Grade in Dickson County, Tennessee. Unpublished Masters Thesis, The University of Tennessee, Knoxville.

Wessel, T. and Wessel, M. (1982). 4-H: An American Idea
1900-1980. Chevy Chase, MD. National 4-H Council.

APPENDIXES

Focus Group Questioning Route

I would like to begin by thanking each of you for taking time to meet with me. Today we will be talking about activities and clubs that teens like you might be involved with. More specifically I will be talking about 4-H. I'm not trying to get you to join 4-H, I just want to find out what you think about 4-H. Some people who make decisions about 4-H could benefit from your ideas so please feel free to comment even if it is negative. Again, thanks for coming now let's begin.

I. Introduction

1. Let's begin by having each of you tell your name and some of the activities or clubs you participate in (this could be sports, church, or other group or individual activities).

II. Transition

2. A number of activities have been mentioned. Think about a club called 4-H and tell me about some of the activities you participated in as a 4-H member.

III. Key

3. What are some of the things about 4-H you liked?
4. What did you like about these activities? (i.e. what made you like these activities)
5. What are some of the things about 4-H you did not like?
6. What did you not like about these activities?
7. What was the major reason for you joining 4-H?
8. Why do you think that some teens decide not to stay involved with 4-H?
9. What do your friends think of 4-H?
10. Do you have any friends who still belong to a 4-H club?
11. Overall, what do you think of 4-H?
12. What do you think should be done to keep teens involved in 4-H?

(DATE)

Dear Student:

You have been identified by your county 4-H agent as someone who might be willing to participate in a study being by the University of Tennessee. The study will be asking teenagers like yourself what you think about the 4-H program in Tennessee. By getting your ideas and opinions about the 4-H program, decision makers will have some ideas about how to make the 4-H program better for everyone. The type of study being done is called a focus group. In a focus group study, a group of people get together and answer questions about a particular topic. The focus group I would like you to participate in will involve about 6 to 10 teenagers like you and should last no longer than 1 hour. We are planning to have this focus group at (NAME OF LOCATION) on (DATE AND TIME) and refreshments will be served. If you would like to participate you will need to bring both of the consent forms with you. Each form should be read and signed prior to the focus group meeting.

Thanks for your time and if you have any questions please feel free to give me a call at the Sequatchie County Extension Office (423) 949-2611.

Sincerely,

Stephen E. Cole
Assistant Extension Agent
Sequatchie County
University of Tennessee
Agricultural Extension Service

Randol G. Waters
Associate Professor
Agricultural and Extension The
Education
The University of Tennessee

PARENT/GUARDIAN CONSENT

My child _____ has my permission to participate in a focus group study where he/she will talk about their experiences and ideas about the 4-H club for approximately one hour. I am aware that the focus group session will be recorded so that researchers can be certain of everyones responses. I understand that only the research team will hear the tape recording and the tape will be kept for three years in a locked storage cabinet at the address below after which the tape will be destroyed. I also understand that my childs participation is voluntary and that I or my child may discontinue participation at any time. I also understand that every effort will be made to maintain the highest degree of confidentiality possible for my child. I also have the right to request the results of this study by writing to the address below.

Mr. Stephen E. Cole, Assistant Extension Agent
University of Tennessee Agricultural Extension Service
Sequatchie County, Tennessee
303 Church St., P.O. Box 548
Dunlap, Tn. 37327-0548
(423) 949-2611

Signature of Parent/Guardian

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATION

I, _____ agree to participate in a focus group study where I and other teenagers will talk about our experiences with the 4-H club. I understand that my responses will be tape recorded so that the researchers can be certain of each response. I also understand that the tape recording will be heard only by the research team. The tapes will be stored in a locked cabinet at the address below for a period of three years after which the tapes will be destroyed. I also understand that my participation is voluntary and that I or my parent /guardian may discontinue participation at any time. I also have the right to request the results of this study by writing to the address below.

Mr. Stephen E. Cole, Assistant Extension Agent
University of Tennessee Agricultural Extension Service
Sequatchie County, Tennessee
303 Church St., P.O. Box 548
Dunlap, Tn. 37327-0548
(423) 949-2611

Signature of Participant

VITA

Stephen Earl Cole was born in Knoxville, Tennessee on August 6, 1971. He attended schools in the North Knoxville School District and graduated from Knoxville Central High School in May, 1989. The following August he began his undergraduate college training at The University of Tennessee, Knoxville. In May, 1993 he completed the requirements for the Bachelor of Science Degree in Wildlife and Fisheries Science. After graduation he was employed by the Tennessee Bureau of State Parks as a Naturalist and later with Fish and Wildlife Associates, Inc. as an Environmental Scientist working with the Tennessee Valley Authority Aquatic Biological Monitoring Program. In June, 1994 he began working part-time on the Master of Science Degree in Agricultural and Extension Education at the University of Tennessee. In March, 1995 he accepted a Graduate Assistant position with the Department of Agricultural and Extension Education and served in that capacity until August, 1996 when he accepted the position of Assistant Extension Agent in Sequatchie County, Tennessee where he is presently employed. He and his wife Jennie have one son Stephen Austin who is four years old.

3815 6852

03/26/98

g

MAB

8
INFORMATION
SERVICES